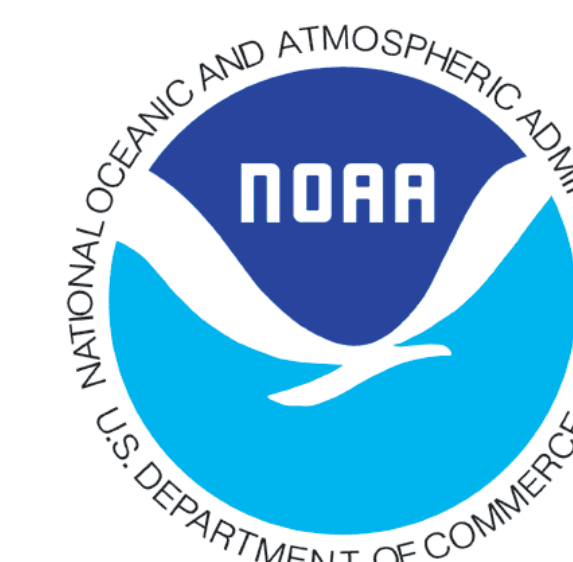


- 1) **Organization Title:** Oak Grove School
- 2) **Title:** "Once Upon a Wetland"
- 3) **Priority Area:** Watershed Experience for Students
- 4) **Partners:** Ojai Valley Land Conservancy, Meiners Oaks Elementary School & Nordhoff High School.
- 5) **Target Audience:** 640+ students in grades pre-K - 12th

# Once Upon a Wetland

## restoring our wetland, our watershed & our world



### 1) Goals and Objectives:

#1. GOAL: To educate students and teachers about our local Ventura River Watershed. OBJECTIVE: By the end of the school year, students and teachers should know: what is a watershed; who lives in the watershed; where is the watershed; which watershed is ours; and why is the watershed important?

#2. GOAL: To raise awareness about the importance and value of wetlands and their role in a healthy watershed community. OBJECTIVE: By the end of the school year, students and teachers should know about the importance and value of wetlands and their role in a healthy watershed community.

#3. GOAL: To raise awareness about the importance and value of a healthy watershed and its role in a healthy World Ocean. OBJECTIVE A: By the end of the school year, students and teachers should know why a healthy watershed is important to the health of our World Ocean. OBJECTIVE B: By the end of the school year, students and teachers should know that our watershed is directly connected to the ocean environment

#4. GOAL: To foster a sense of community ownership and shared responsibility for our natural environment at the local (watershed) scale. OBJECTIVE: By the end of the school year, students and teachers at Oak Grove School, Meiners Oaks Elementary School, and Nordhoff High School should feel (a) more connected to one another as a cooperative community, and (b) should feel that the OMP and Channel islands belong to all of us and that it is everyone's responsibility to take care of them. [Expressed in the year-end summative survey as well as in personal dialogue.]

#5. GOAL: To instill confidence, hope, and a sense of empowerment in students and teachers, helping them to see that their actions do make a difference. OBJECTIVE: By the end of the school year, students and teachers should feel that they have made a difference by improving the ecological health of the OMP wetland as well as Santa Cruz and Anacapa Islands.

### 2) Project Overview:

The "Once Upon a Wetland" project provides a meaningful watershed experience to students at Oak Grove School, Meiners Oaks Elementary School, and Nordhoff High School by engaging them in the restoration and stewardship of the historic wetland located on the Ojai Meadows Preserve, directly adjacent to all three schools.



The project connects students to their own backyard, their home, their place-- in other words, their watershed-- by emphasizing the intrinsic ecological relationships of all things (including people!) within the watershed and the direct connection of our Ventura River Watershed to the local ocean environment.



During the 2006-07 school year "Once Upon a Wetland" provided approximately 10-12 outdoor experiences per student to over 640 students!

The "Once upon a Wetland..." watershed experience has three components: a **preparation phase**, an **outdoor/action phase**, and a **reporting/reflection phase**:

The **preparation phase** has two levels. First, assembly-style presentations, slideshows, and films illustrate the broader context for the outdoor activity to follow. Second, in-class orientation with images and discussion immediately precede any outdoor activities. All lessons/presentations seek to illuminate questions such as: what is a watershed; who lives in the watershed; where is the watershed; which watershed is ours; and why is the watershed important?

The **outdoor/action phase** is the primary focus of this project and comprises a bulk of time spent. Visits to the Preserve occur on a monthly basis for each participating class and are sustained throughout the school year, through all four seasons. Activities on the Preserve center around native seed collection in the fall, starting and propagating the plants through the winter, and planting the natives on the land in the spring. At the end of the school year. Other activities have included: water quality monitoring, soil sampling and testing, wildlife surveys, plant success rate monitoring, and stream studies. Water quality monitoring with the students is part of a long-term monitoring program for the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy.

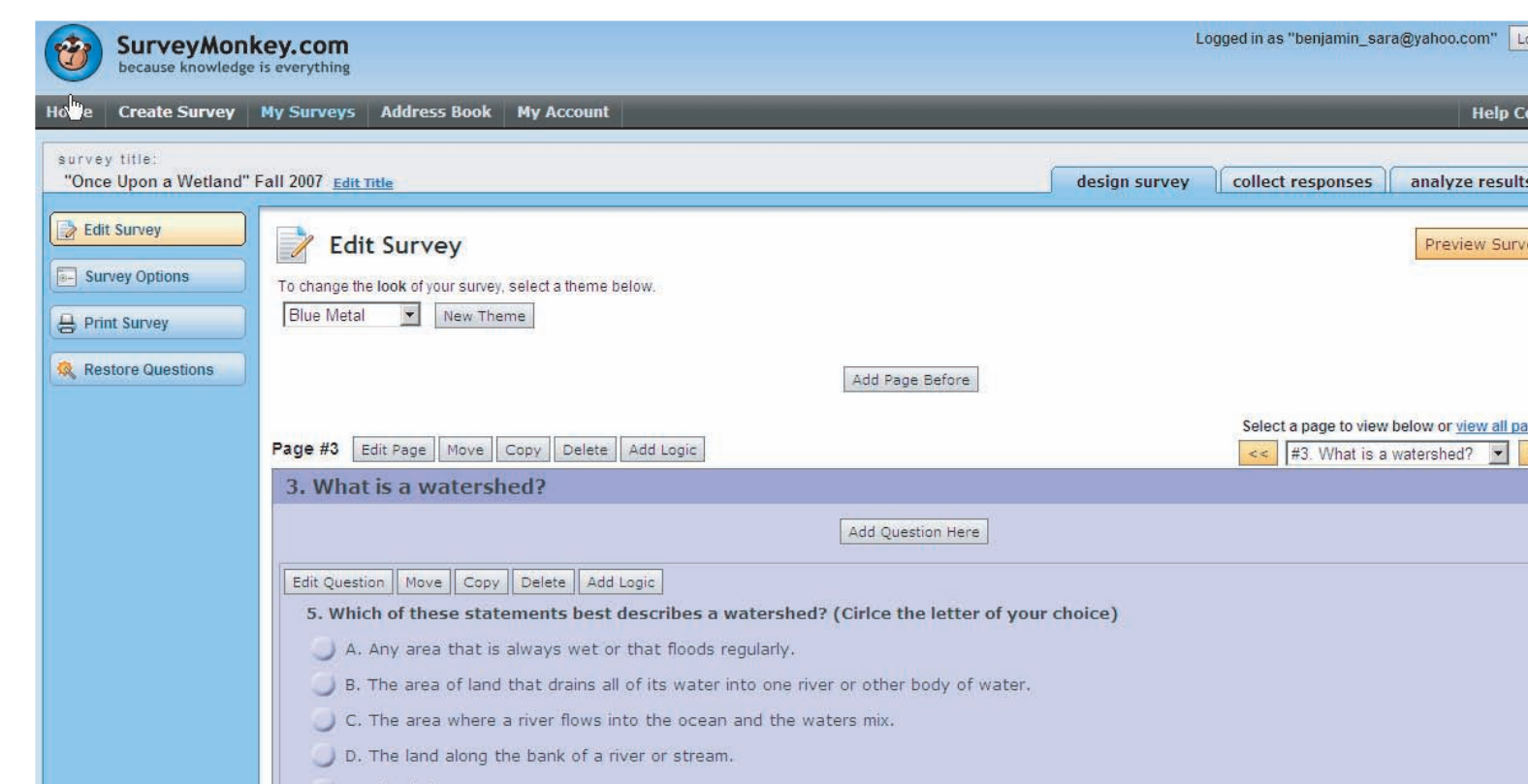


The **reflection phase** manifests differently in each classroom according to grade level and the inspiration of students and teachers. Some classes produce newsletters for their friends and families, some classes keep journals and share with their peers, some create oral and/or static presentations to be shared at the community-wide Earth Day event. Media coverage of the program throughout the year also raises awareness and helps to educate and inform the community at large. A group of inspired parents even spear-headed a beautiful local mural!



### 3) Evaluation Plan:

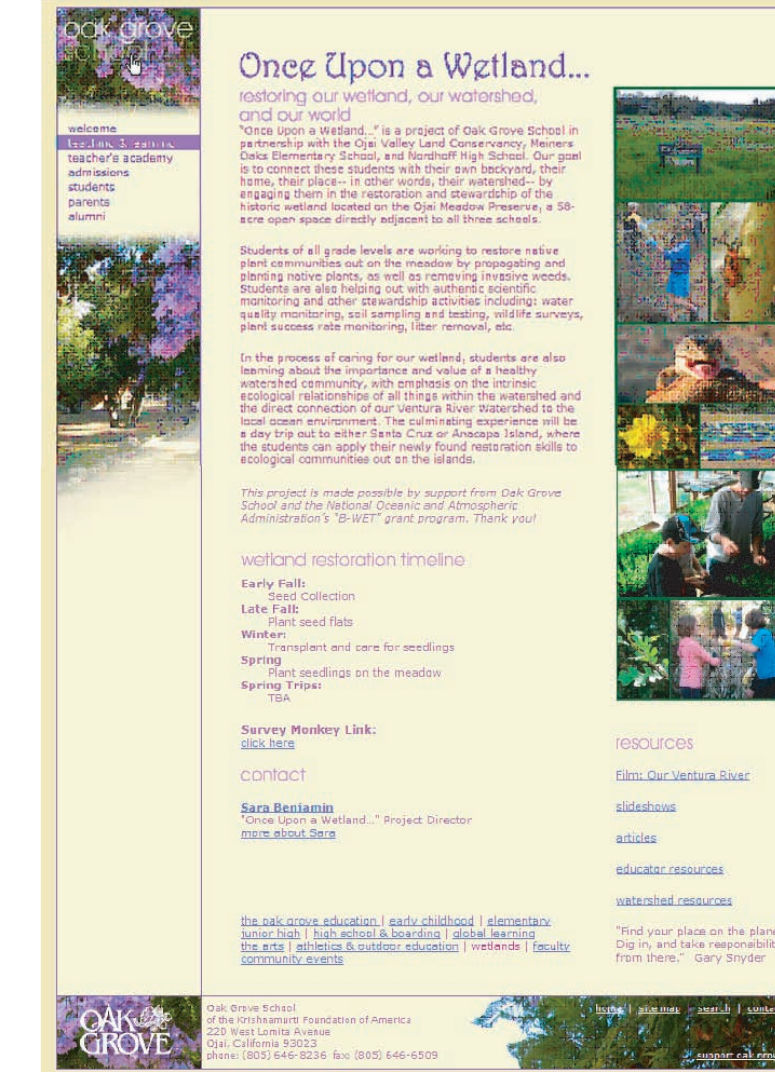
Written evaluations took the form of online survey/questionnaires completed at the beginning and end of the school year. The first survey is formative (establishing the baseline for watershed and wetland comprehension) while year-end surveys are summative (used to guide judgments about a project's impact and value). Survey questions are designed to gauge how successful the project has been in achieving its goals and objectives. For example, by the end of the school year, students and teachers should know **what** a watershed is, **who** lives in the watershed, **where** the watershed is, **why** the watershed is important, and that we live in the Ventura River Watershed.



### 1) Products:

The primary "product" for this project is the revegetated and recovering Ojai Meadows Preserve itself. All of the students' work planting natives, removing invasives, picking up litter, etc. has helped to restore healthy wetland functions back to the Preserve.

A website was also developed for the project and includes locally relevant watershed resources for teachers, parents and students.



### 2) Results/Lessons Learned:

The first goal of the project was to educate students and teachers about our local Ventura River Watershed so that by the end of the school year, students and teachers should know: *what* is a watershed; *who* lives in the watershed; *where* is the watershed; *which* watershed is ours; and *why* is the watershed important? By the end of the year, well over 80-90% of students of all grades were able to correctly identify a watershed, who lives there, and it's importance. However, only 40-60% knew the name of their watershed, therefore this should be further emphasized.

The second goal, to raise awareness about the importance and value of wetlands and their role in a healthy watershed community was also achieved. A vast majority of respondents of all grades (60-80%) knew about the importance and value of wetlands and their role in a healthy watershed community. However, while K-6th grade students were able to correctly define a wetland, only 25% of high school students were able to define a wetland! In future years I will not expect them to already understand this term.

The third goal, to raise awareness about the importance and value of a healthy watershed and its role in a healthy World Ocean was also met. A majority of respondents (60%-70%) knew why a healthy watershed is important to the health of our World Ocean and a vast majority (80-90%) knew that our watershed is directly connected to the ocean environment.

The fourth goal, to foster a sense of community ownership and shared responsibility for our natural environment at the local (watershed) scale was only partially successful. Over 70% of students in all grades felt that that the health of the wetlands, watershed, and ocean environments are everyone's shared responsibility. Forty percent felt connected to students at the other schools while 40% felt only "a little" connected, therefore more interaction between the schools during the year is needed.

Additional recommendations for improving the evaluation process include:

- Don't include teachers in online survey because their responses cannot be easily parsed out and because it is effective to gather hand-written responses from them.
- Don't have K-3 do online survey UNLESS I am personally able to go into each class and tally by a show of hands.
- Combine all surveys into one survey for grades 4th to high school in order to ease assessment and increase feasibility.
- Decrease number of questions asked and re-format so that all questions relate directly back to program goals.

New or expanded components of the project will include: (1) a week-long overnight restoration work trip for middle school (and potentially high school) participants to the UC Field Research Station on Santa Cruz Island; (2) indigenous knowledge of native plants, water, sustainability, and cultural history on both the mainland and the Channel Islands, (3) Ventura College will be a new partner, providing college-age volunteers as mentors and interns for the project; (4) regular water quality monitoring in the watershed with the Ventura River Stream Team and also on the Ojai Meadows Preserve, (4) expansion of the project to serve all public schools in the watershed and additional watershed sites where possible.